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SUBJECT: NINEWA: TAL AFAR SHEIKHS WANT MORE ASSISTANCE FROM USG ON  
SECURITY AND ECONOMIC ISSUES

REF: MOSUL 220

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CLASSIFIED BY: Cameron Munter, PRT Leader, Provincial  
Reconstruction Team Ninewa, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) Recent U.S. press coverage has painted a positive picture of Tal Afar's security situation. But some locals see it otherwise. Sunni Arab tribal leaders are upset by what they claim are poor security conditions in Tal Afar. Local sheikhs threatened that Sunnis would leave the city if the situation did not improve. They blamed the problem on a former chief of police who stacked the force with corrupt Shia cronies and fired Sunni officers, and faulted the USG and Coalition Forces (CF) as well. The sheikhs accused CF of taking a "blind eye" to Sunni concerns in the area by siding with Shias. The sheikhs said, for example, that reconstruction projects have only benefited Shia neighborhoods. The sheikhs said anti-insurgency operations by CF and Iraqi Security Forces in Tal Afar last September increased the number of terrorists rather than removed them. The sheikhs claimed that securing Tal Afar was important to USG and Iraqi Government interests since it would provide stability to the province as a whole. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) PRT Poloff met with Turkmen Front and Tawafoq Iraqi Front coalition candidate and national assemblyman EzAlDeen AbdulAllah Houseen, Sheikh Shehab Ahmed Hassan, leader of the Al-Jarjariah tribe, Sheikh Falah Mohammed Younis, leader of the Al-Farahat tribe, and Sheikh Ali Mohammed Saeed, leader of the Halai Bake tribe, in Mosul on February 21.

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SECURING TAL AFAR KEY TO STABILITY IN THE PROVINCE  
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¶3. (C) Recent articles in the U.S. press have depicted the American counterinsurgency effort in the Northwestern city of Tal Afar as a success, providing security for the beleaguered population. But some of our contacts do not feel that way. Erupting in a chorus of criticism, the sheikhs began by saying security conditions in Tal Afar have deteriorated. Houseen accused former Tal Afar Chief of Police Ismael Faris, a Shia, with stacking the police full of unqualified and corrupt Shia cronies while removing good Sunni officers. He called Faris a criminal who should be brought to justice. Houseen claimed Faris fled the city with help from Iraqi Security Forces (ISF),

and now works in the special investigations unit of the Ministry of Interior in Baghdad. Houseen claimed that capturing and trying Faris could solve 60 percent of all security problems in Tal Afar. He said it would contribute to stability in the province as a whole, allow Iraqis to have faith in the justice system, as well as frighten away terrorists.

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TENSION BETWEEN SECURITY FORCES AND RESIDENTS  
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¶4. (C) Speaking on behalf of the sheikhs, Houseen accused Coalition Forces (CF) of siding with Shias in the police force. He said corrupt Iraqi Police (IP) in Tal Afar had taken advantage of the strong relationship with CF to "harass" Sunnis. Houseen said that IP would enter a Sunni neighborhood and report to CF patrolling nearby that they received gunfire, for example. What ensued, according to Houseen, were random raids on Sunni houses. Younis said when IP and CF conduct searches they take identification cards, photos, jewelry, and damage property. He said such actions cause Sunnis to "hate Americans." Younis said filing a claim with CF for damaged or missing property was difficult for Sunnis. He said they could only travel to the Castle complex, where IP and CF maintain their offices, via a road on the Shia side of town. He claimed Shia hang out nearby and finger approaching Sunnis as terrorists to IP and CF. Younis said he spoke to CF commanders about the problem on numerous occasions but that nothing resulted from the talks. He suggested a second road on the Sunni side of the complex be opened instead.

¶5. (C) Houseen claimed there were too many checkpoints in and around the city, which contributed to traffic and "suppression of Sunnis." He requested that IP checkpoints be removed and replaced with non-Kurdish Iraqi Army (IA) or CF units. Regarding other issues with IP, Houseen claimed there were many instances where innocent Sunnis were killed within eyeshot of IP stations but that the officers refused to respond. Houseen said he believed there were good officers in the IP, but that they

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were powerless to help because of corruption in the higher ranks. Houseen and the sheikhs recommended that the Tal Afar IP be scrapped and rebuilt. Houseen said once problems with IP in Tal Afar were solved security would improve and allow displaced Sunnis who fled during counterinsurgency operations last September to return to the city.

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USG AT FAULT FOR POOR SECURITY IN TAL AFAR  
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¶6. (C) Houseen recommended the USG use "diplomacy" and not "force" to change attitudes in Iraq. Sheikh Saeed said CF and ISF counterinsurgency efforts last year made security worse and contributed to increased tensions between Shia and Sunnis. He claimed as a result more terrorists were created than removed from Tal Afar. He said before the operation there were only 250 terrorists in the city, and that now there were 2,000. Saeed accused CF of taking weapons away only from Sunnis during the operation, which made them feel powerless. Younis said poor economic conditions drove many youth to conduct terrorist and criminal activities to earn money. He claimed many were sent to prisons, such as Abu Gharib, where they were "brainwashed by Islamic fanatics." Once they were released, said Younis, they tried to kill Shia and CF.

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DEVELOPMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION FAILINGS  
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¶7. (C) Houseen claimed reconstruction and development projects evidenced how the USG and CF have so far not listened to Sunni leaders in Tal Afar. He said many projects have not worked to the benefit of the people as a whole, since Shia neighborhoods have better schools and services than Sunni ones. Younis called

many contractors "war profiteers" that have taken advantage of poor security conditions to pilfer money from projects at the expense of Iraqis and the U.S. taxpayer.

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THREAT TO LEAVE TAL AFAR  
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18. (C) Saeed said he holds the USG responsible for "everything that is wrong in Iraq." He claimed the USG "started the problem" by invading the country, and now was obliged to "finish it." The message from Tal Afar residents, according to the sheikhs, is that if problems were not corrected soon Sunni residents would "leave Tal Afar." Younis said the mass departure should be regarded as a "civil strike" to oppose poor security conditions and a lack of attention to the area.

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COMMENT  
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19. (C) While we have heard complaints from the sheikhs and Houseen in the past, the threat to vacate the city en masse was new. It could be viewed as an act of desperation to bring attention to conditions there. Or, as a ploy to remind us that, despite the country's move to democracy, the sheikhs still regard themselves as leaders of their communities. We believe much of their anger is due to their fear of losing influence in a democratic Iraq (reftel). Whatever their motivations, the sheikhs claimed they have used every opportunity to help Sunnis in Tal Afar by speaking to government and military officials alike. They believe, however, that no one has been listening so far, and told Poloff they regarded the visit as a "last chance" to help Tal Afar's Sunnis before tensions with Shias reached a boiling point. Although the Embassy, Coalition Forces, and this PRT have worked hard to bring Sunnis into the democratic process, more work needs to be done to get them to buy into the image of a new, safer Tal Afar.

MUNTER